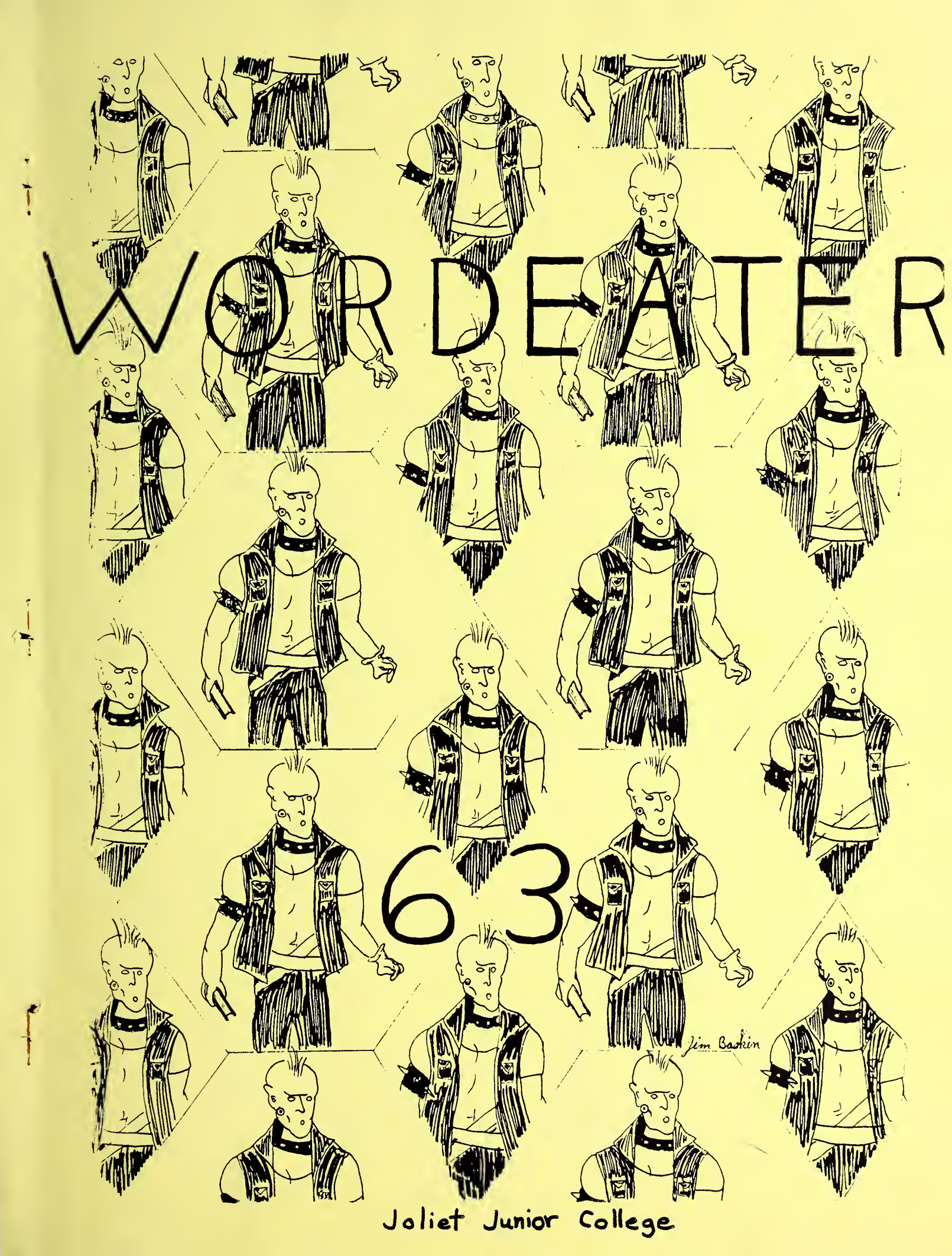

Joliet Junior College

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In order to get a selection published in this issue, four of the above had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

NEXT DEADLINE:

April 22, 1988

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Daniel E. Howard

HAIR COLOR IN RELATION TO MYTHOLOGY

I'm not really sure what it is about you
For all I know it could be that blonde hair
But anyone could be a blonde with a treatment
It's just a matter of wanting it there

So what is it about you that makes you so different
Why are leading the pack by a mile
Sure, you're charming, but sorry to say
Any woman with teeth has the same winning smile

You're witty, bright, alluring, and gifted
Like thousands of others, a few that I know
Yet I place you above them, ahead of the class
I really don't understand why this is so

I guess it comes down to that ancient conclusion
A mythical emotion 'bout people who care
Perhaps it could be that I really do love you
Nah, couldn't be that
Must be the blonde hair

****

Judy Belfield

DOG DAY

Something in the distant
heat shimmer
humid horizon
visually distorted
as seen through
dimestore glass,
or cellophane,
a stigmatic blur
trying to right itself-
something there,
in the heat,
a metaphysical presence
nameless as Hebrew Who-Am
weighs heavily as guilt
nags the soul insistently
to search memory
for an answer:
A day long ago, perhaps,
pierced with an unbearable sadness
time has dulled
but now aches with hints
in the distant heat

****

Elizabeth Russell

ANTI-FREEZE

Biting winds chill the
surface flesh but cannot freeze
a warm, inner peace.

****

Kevin Lear

JAPANESE MOVIES

Godzilla is a classic
I can't read their lips.

****

M. RamZ

ANY CUT

I remember a cut so deep
the blood gushed burning
from the separated skin
and shock waves wracked my heaving lungs.
No difference, though, to that cut
and the bloodless one
which left scar tissue
inside my chest
that sharp, true words
did cut.

****

MaryAnn DesMarais

TEDDY BEARS

My room is full of them all
each so cuddly -n- cute
short -n- fat; skinny -n- tall
to others--they seem awfully mute
to me--they are footholds when I fall

When others offer disdaindul shrugs,
-n- hurtful shoves
From them I get tender hugs
-n- unconditional love

****

V.G.

KID

I don't believe in the boogyman,
but I'm scared of him.

****

Elizabeth Russell

TRICKS ARE FOR KIDS

Her tongue moistens her coral lips. She
cocks her head and glances with a
plastered grin at passers-by.
Patterned stockings suck her legs. Supple
black leather croons over the rest
of her body. Her eyes are like
carnival rides.
The stoplight on her corner reflects hues
of red, yellow and green against the
backdrop of potential customers--no
one notices.
It's the day before payday. The faces
are penniless, so is the tainted lady.
No dope on the hot town tonight.

****

D.O.A.

I sit in the shadows of my own creations,
alone.
I write a letter to those who no longer love me,
alone.
I undress in the bathroom waiting for the moment,
alone.
I take the sharp razor and open my jugular,
alone.
I see my tears in a crimson mirror, and don't want to die,
alone.

****

Elizabeth Russell

ILLUSION

Morning frost twinkles
like refracted prism rain-
bows after cloudbursts

****

Judy Belfield

BEFORE KINDERGARTEN

Music recalled in blur
of yesterday melodies
Sheherazade and Ink Spots,
Perry Como and Carmen
unable to disentangle,
become a wistful paragraph
of an ephemeral afternoon;
instead, a phrase of each
behind a voice reciting
"...went to sea
in a beautiful pea-green boat..."
Eyelid insides remember
pages from the books:
German Christs with wretched eyes
delicate DaVinci fingers,
Dali watches, Boticelli graces,
Michaelangelo faces,
"Bobby Shaftoe went to sea
silver buckles on his knee..."
Liszt rhapsodies, Byzantine virgins,
El Greco torsos,
"The highway came riding..."
I do not try to make connections
extract any sensation from another.
I am overloaded today
with the things my mother loved.
I love them too; let them happen.

****

LaVerne Lunger-Bucaro

WHEN WE WERE KIDS IN THE '30's

My husband and I were just sitting around one wintry evening, and we began talking about the things we did while growing up. What fun we had!

We started affectionately musing about "free" stuff, clothes, activities that kept us busy and the events of the time. We ended up misty-eyed.

We remembered the "winner," the yellow and red-striped gumball in the penny machine. You won a free five-cent candy bar if you were lucky.

Then there was the mint pattie

(continued)

for a penny; an orange one meant a nickel winner.

There was also a long chocolate caramel; if you had a white center, you were a winner. Nickel candy bar.

There were Popsicles with "free" embedded on the wooden stick in brown letters.

I've often wondered what prevented me from becoming a professional gambler. How I loved to take chances--penny at a time.

At the school store, there were penny wax bottles with liquid in them. You could chew the wax when you finished the liquid. This little item costs $1.59 a pound at the supermarket today.

My husband and I were both born and raised in Chicago just before and the year of the '29 Depression so we both experienced this era with a first-hand impression. It wasn't easy!

My husband exclaimed, "My mom always saw to it that we had nice warm clothes. She'd order from the Sears Roebuck catalog and would pay on time. He remembered how proud he was of his new laced boots, knickers, and brown leather jacket. I'm sure he had better clothes then than he has now!

I remembered a scant wardrobe, usually hand-me-downs from my older sister. What made it worse, my Mom didn't know how to hem dresses.

I do remember Buster Brown haircuts and huge, fancy ribbons. How I hated those! I thought I was the ugliest creature on two legs in first grade.

For years, I wore galoshes! UG-LY. I was in junior high school before the cute white boots were in style.

Then, to be in, you had to have one of those yard-sized babushkas with the long yarn fringe dangling from it. I think I made my own, I can't remember.

We both recalled the first time we saw "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." We recalled looking for empty bottles for admission.

We remembered the tatooes you could wash off your hands.

Iron-on tee-shirt transfers were the rage in those days.

There was a milkman with his horse and buggy that delivered milk and dairy products to your home for only a few cents more than the store. Then the milk companies switched to trucks. I guess it took more to feed a truck than it did a horse because now the milkman is extinct!

We fondly remembered the old rag man with his horse and buggy who yelled, "Rags, old iron, newspapers!" In those days, we stacked and saved newspapers, scoured the basement for scrap and searched the neighborhood for junk. We even saved old rags. Can you believe it? The rag man had a scale on his wagon to weigh the precious cargo. My mom was always happy to hear this guy, for she knew it would bring a little order to our backyard and basement.

My mother used to take me for shoes, and it seemed my feet grew so fast. The salesman had an easy answer to a correct fit. They used to have an X-ray machine that you could put your feet into and could see your bones and that determined your new correct size. To this day, I wonder about the effectiveness and accuracy of that thing. My sister said her chiropodist told her that her problem was from wearing a size smaller than she really needed--all her life. I guess I'm lucky; no problems.

I can vividly remember when the Chicago public schools were closed due to a polio epidemic. I'm not sure, but I think I was in second grade. Our home project was to complete a scrapbook and turning it in upon the opening of school. I also recall how scared I was.

To keep me busy, my mom taught me how to embroider. To this day, I enjoy it!

We also made yarn dolls, a boy and a girl, and sold them for ten cents a pair. Everyone was wearing them.

She also kept me busy with an empty thread spool that had four nails pounded into one end. I made braid strings which made up into pot holders or rugs.

We collected Dixie cup lids because they had pictures of movie stars on them. We traded, just like the kids traded baseball cards, and still do.

My husband loved to "pop" morning glories. He wasn't too popular with his neighbors. I can see why. He still loves to pop things. He scares

(continued)

the daylights out of me when he pops plastic bags.

One of the most satisfying projects of our time was that of building an orange crate scooter. Obviously, we made them out of orange crates plus an old pair of roller skates. If you had a candle attached to the front for night driving, your crate was considered to be a "Cadillac" of scooters.

We laughed and laughed as we recalled these memories. I suppose we felt a little shadow of melancholy come over us, but I guess that's the way it is when you remember.

****

d f aiello

MARY, MOTHER, AND ME

We rise
and sing
on the gossamer wings
of voices spoken
and heard long ago.

We hear
and feel
as the Earth Mother kneels
suckling the children
torn from their wombs.

We taste
and eat
from the salty browned meat
of the mortal who looks
toward blue heaven's gate.

We touch
and comfort
with soft bosom rhythm
the boy who cries out
with shame in the night.

We ache
and smile
as we walk the many miles
and a tear on your cheek
wipes ours away.

****

Elizabeth Russell

LEO

He was Irish indeed and played pool like
a hawk.
The harder he drank, the harder he fought.
He was jolly at once, or mad as a hatter.
And even at times, his life made no matter.

But he still made the break and sunk every
ball.
Drunk or sober, he still won them all.

Then one day his luck changed, he had no
one to blame.
He married the eight ball, and lost the
last game.

****

Jon Batuzich

GOD TODDLES

Bow down before me fools
I am your god
Praise me mortals
as I give you children
and take them
Praise me mortals
as I rape your women
Praise me mortals
for I have filled the world with
flowers, trees, oceans, seas
AIDS, cancer, death and disease
Praise me mortals
for as you say
I work in mysterious ways
I gave you Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Gleason
I also gave you Hitler, Gacy and Manson
These last 3 men were put away
But I get temples, altars, and fame
for I am your god, and I do the same
Praise me mortals

****

Lisa Strubin

CRYSTAL FANTASY

Snow covers the ground
like confectioner's sugar
sprinkles on pancakes.

****

Baba Mattai

TO A WISE MAN

What hidden treasures lie
secrete in the canyons
of thy mind;
what noble, aristocratic
expressions of language
behoove thee
to tell me, thou holiest
of sages?
Draw near and bare thy breast
if thou canst, to the lowliest
of thy apprentices.

I have seen thee in thy glory
amidst the writings especially
of the Greeks -
foraging, foraging, foraging;
amidst the pages of
that bard of the psyche,
his equal yet to be seen,
to proffer understanding of a species
in deep distress.
What's there thou needst tell me,
tell me, I pray.

Thy valued complexity, Ah!
There's the challenge,
addressing things ultimate
to add if but a smidgin
of meaning,
yet profound, yet able to say
more than can be known
of myself, by myself.
Desist no, mercifully, from thy pursuit,
lest I, for one, be left forlorn,
tormented, hapless in Maia's arms.

****

Cheri L. Workman

BEWARE

Smile like
a razor
but
beware
I know of the games
you play
My God
I wrote the script!

****

Judy Belfield

ALEXANDRIA

One evening
in torchlit rooms
a lone man read
dreamed of romance...
A sunset explosion
lighting horizon
conflagration spitting heat
a peppering of fire,
the last of papyrus rolls
turning black the collection
of all we knew.
Eratosthenes screamed
his face red-orange
pillowed in flame:
Tomorrow, tears,
after the smoldering simpering
trailed away toward Rome
when it was too late
even for regret.
We wonder now
what we knew--
if perhaps a simple story
caught a pair of lovers
held them
like bodies in Pompeii
an ancient couple
courting forever
until disaster...

****

John Buell

REACH OUT FROM YOUR SOLEMN SLEEP

Reach out from your
solemn sleep.
Open your eyes,
look at me weep.
Pierce my heart,
my mind,
my fear,
and enter this world
through another man's tears.

****

ESS AND EM

She's my S&M baby
Yeah, she's all mine.
She whips me, maybe,
But that's all fine.
Oooo!
Baby!
Oh!
Harder!
Oooo! Oh!
Harder! Harder!
Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!
Ouch, Bitch!

****

James Burkey

LOVEY-DOVEY STUFF

I thought you and I would go on forever
Never-ending, never stopping.
Thank God I was wrong.

****

Jon Batuzich

CHAINSAW WHORER

Disect me with your eyes
   love me like a knife
Carve my still beating heart
   from my bleeding chest
I'll give you my life
You give me your razor sharp love
   together forever in a
cold steel blood orgy
Smearing the sticky red fluid
   across our breasts
     and face
You're a chainsaw whorer
Here to wreak havoc on my psyche
   and drink my cooling blood
     But I love you
      and your skull...

****

"WHIPPED" SNEAK

The dwelling is quiet, they're all asleep.
it's half past twelve, to the kitchen I
   sneak.
Tiptoe, tiptoe, through the dark house
Silently, silently, quiet as a mouse.
I open the refrigerator, slowly as can be.
Looking for the thing I hide especially
   for me.
Back in the corner behind the milk and ham.
I spy the little beauty in the red and
   white can.
If Mama could have seen me, I think she
   would have died.
Tilt back my head and open my mouth wide.
Push down the nozzle, fill it to the
   brim.
Swallow one down and do it again.
When my deed is finished, back to bed I
   quietly slip.
And think about tomorrow and my can of
"Reddi Whip".

****

M. RamZ

HEADBANGER

Roeg stood near the Headbanger apparatus and marvelled at his work of engineering; the years of labor and the intense pressure the State had placed upon him had not been in vain. He had succeeded in creating the perfect mind-blank device.

Roeg was a large man, nearing middle age, with premature white hair and the deep facial crevices of a man beleaguered with duty and responsibility. He wore a dull green industrial jumpsuit and hard leather workboots; tinted goggles hung around his veiny neck. He would have resembled an overworked factory laborer had it not been for the intense genius that burned in his face.

There, in the cavernous cemented lab, his impressive device was housed. The Headbanger--or, Transition Device 20P, as the State regarded it officially-- stretched from one end of the

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warehouse-like chamber to an abrupt impasse at the west wall.

The device was a hundred and fifty yards in length. It began as a cannon-platform at the east foundation: This was a massive iron barrel, from which the lock-chair and helmet were shot at an unbelievable speed. From there, the lock-chair would zoom across the hard, siliconed alloy tracks and into the padded west wall, which would serve as a mitt, catching the lock-chair and impacting with the helmet.

Painless to the man in the helmet, Roeg reasoned.

He walked over to a podium-like console alive with flashing lights. He pressed a hard, gloved finger to one of the buttons.

"Miss Coyle," he said into the microphone.

A dull replying voice, void of emotion, echoed through the chamber, "Yes, Doctor."

"Who is tonight's scheduled Transition, please?"

"One moment."

Roeg eyed the shiny alloyed tracks and imagined the process in his mind again. He had performed this service to the State countless previous times.

It was his job to destroy minds.

He heard rustling papers over the intercom and Miss Coyle spoke again. "Doctor?"

"Yes."

"The file I've pulled for tonight's Transition is Benjamin Kidd."

Roeg's back stiffened. Finally, tonight the State was to be rid of the rebel-intellectual who had overrode the censors once too often. He was a beacon to the common people, a brilliant, young scholar of the P-M Institute who spoke out against the State for closing the universities and for feeding the masses lies on the network.

Kidd had failed to conform. A prolific engineer, he had refused to sell his potentially dangerous works to the State, which was pushing for world domination.

Tonight, thought Roeg, there would be a satisfaction and deep meaning to his work.

Eventually, dissenters such as Kidd were sent to mind-blank spas, where inner psyches were systematically destroyed on a daily basis by a rigorous brainwashing technique, which involved staring at gray TV monitors and listening to static on earphones.

Such ridiculous tactics might have worked on the weak of spirit, but some, like Benjamin Kidd, were too strong intellectually to be broken down. That is why the State had hand-picked the extraordinary physics-mechanics engineer Phillip Roeg. They had employed him to create an effective, irreversible system of mindblank. But because the State was just, and did not believe in the cruelty of capital punishment or the maiming of flesh with sharp instruments, they insisted that the process involve no pain whatsoever to the subject, and that the subject would remain functional.

Lobotomies were out; lasers and scalpels were out.

It was the common belief of the State that taking a man's mind away from him, especially a great mind, was the worst punishment it could perform. Although the Transitions, or mindblanks, were done in the secrecy of Roeg s basement lab, the State let the breeze of rumor filter about the country so that any revolutionary intellectual would know what to expect. All a rebel had to do for discouragement was stand outside the chicken wire fence at the Potato Farm; inside, white pajama units of dead men stared at nothing as they toiled in the fields of this Headbanger dumping ground. After Headbanging, the mindless zombies were allowed to lead a meaningless existence tilling the earth.

Suddenly the drone of Miss Coyle's voice came over the intercom.

"Doctor?"

"Yes."

"We have a State official requesting access to Transition Lab 20B."

Roeg frowned. "Does his code clear with the system?"

"Yes," replied Miss Coyle.

"Access granted," he forced himself to say.

The engineer walked out of the Headbanger housing area and into a circular tunnel that had once been a sewage outlet, in the days when the building had been a university tower. Cool air whistled down the trachea-like tunnel.

After a hundred yards, Roeg came to a small cement vault. On the chamber door a chromium lock clung like a shiny, immovable octopus. Digital numbers upon the face of the lock flashed in

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the dimness; the joints of the segmented arms bent slowly with hydraulic hiss. The thick metal door rolled backward.

Inspector Rank stood in the darkness of the outside world. Roeg saluted Rank and received the same. "Greetings from the State," Rank said tightly. He was a young man, handsome, but with wicked features and the furious eyes of one who had digested excessive amounts of propaganda. He wore a long, amber trenchcoat branded with the black cross of the State. Knee-high boots stood squarely at attention. Rank's jet, oily hair was slicked back and looked like a skin-tight helmet; clenched jaws met with high, pale temples.

"The State is most welcome," Roeg lied.

The two men discussed the project as they walked, both feeling uneasiness toward one another, but concealing it expertly.

"My superiors are impressed with your results thus far," said Rank.

"My thanks."

"Tonight, however, we would like to have a representative at the lab during the Transition."

"This is why you have come tonight?" asked Roeg. His face was sour.

"I would not bother myself with such frivolous activities if it were not for one reason: Kidd."

"Do your superiors think I am unable to mindblank one of the greatest thinkers of our time?" Roeg asked, almost angrily. "They needn't have worried. I have no margin of error."

Rank stepped into the Headbanger lab and eyed the apparatus for the first time.

"Nevertheless," he said, "I am here."

The inspector began to scrutinize the machine-project. He pulled a pair of round spectacles from his coat pocket and placed them over his doubting eyes. He scanned the leviathon cannon, lock-chair, and oversized helmet. He traced the track with his boots until it met with the wall.

"This is Transition Device 20B?" Rank asked, unbelieving.

"I prefer to call it the Headbanger," the engineer replied.

"And does it work?"

Roeg prepared himself for a lengthy monologue involving velocity, physics-mechanics, and mass impact. Rank perceived this.

"In layman's terms, Doctor."

"In layman's terms, it is as simple as shackling a man into the lock-chair, placing his head into the shock-absorber helmet, and ramming him at the speed of sound into the padded wall."

"That's all?" asked Rank.

"It's really much more than that. The Headbanger process is an exact science, Inspector. Cushioning the helmet just right, positioning it exactly, braking the lock-chair at the precise moment of impact.

"I am not allowed to use a scalpel...I must use science to maim."

Rank was genuinely impressed.

"My compliments, Doctor. Certainly the experiment has proven itself effective."

Roeg gloated. "Shwartau, Kelling, Natlin: all of them were decided threats to the State. I quieted them all, forever."

Rank nodded. "Truly, you are an asset to the State."

Roeg and Rank were seated on folding chairs, completing clipboard forms, when the cool voice broke over the intercom. "Escorts have reported in. Code clears."

"Let them in," mumbled the doctor, absorbed in the paperwork.

Within minutes, multiple clangings were heard coming from the nearby tunnel. Three men emerged from the open mouth. Two were wearing trenchcoats and saluted Rank and Roeg. The third stood there, handcuffed, with a somber face and a sharpness in his eyes that seemed to cut the air.

Rank stood up and walked to the prisoner.

"Benjamin Kidd, I, representative of the State, sentence you to Transition.

Kidd, the young, brooding, imaginative genius, knew the horrible fate ahead of him; he faced it without complaint.

(continued)

He made a promise, however. "One day," he said, "men will be able to think freely and use their minds for the good of their brothers."

Rank did not understand this concept, but knew that he should have been offended.

"Fool, he said contemptuously.

Roeg broke in. "It grieves me, what I must do--I do not consider the snuffing out of a mind as something trivial--but you are a threat to the State."

Kidd nodded his dimpled, freckled face. "I am proud to consider myself so."

"So be it," Roeg pronounced. He walked over to the electronic console and flipped the heavy mother switch; the entire basement lab resounded with vibration. The nuclear generator surged beneath the floor.

"Strap him in," snapped the Doctor. The escorts, familiar with the process, led Kidd to the lock-chair and began strapping him in. While this was being done, Roeg put on his infrared goggles and began typing at the glowing computer board. Rank stood by his side, confused.

"A couple of minutes and we'll be ready," Roeg promised.

By now all that could be seen of Kidd were his shoulders and his hands. His bright orange head had been swallowed up by the huge chrome-dome of the helmet. He was being fed oxygen.

His hands were trapped tightly in a bizarre, state-of-the-art version of the stocks. His ankles were strapped onto the bottom of the lock-chair; his body was pitched forward at a sharp degree, and his face, wherever it was, looked to the ground.

The helmet shone brilliantly as, all around the previously dormant lab, green and gold lights began to flash. A high-pitched whine began to intensify the air.

The escorts and Rank were ordered behind a thick lead shield in a far corner. They could view the crash through ultraviolet blinds. Roeg's console was also protected.

His face became very serious as he worked the controls; the lock-chair slowly cocked back into the barrel of the cannon.

He licked his lips nervously and brought the lever down.

The explosion from the cannon was a bright, intense pink. Streaks of white electricity danced wildly about the room for a brief moment and sparks dotted the air. The pop of the boom was sufferable, but left a ringing in the ear; a short, screaming squeak, as final and irreversible as a bullet, was actually the lock-chair on its brief, one-second journey. The second explosion--an echoing, intimidating thud--was the chair hitting the pad.

Smoke, hot and burning to the nostrils, clouded, then dispersed. The lab was silent.

"It is done," Roeg said grimly.

"Let's see how the cake turned out," said one of the escorts walking out from behind the blind.

"Be careful with him," the doctor warned. "he's had a hell of a trip."

The two guards began to unfasten the limp, unconscious Kidd. He lay in the chair like a rag doll; his hands were white and clenched, as hard as iron. When the mouth of the helmet finally released his head, a pale, unconscious imitation of the rebel fell to one shoulder.

Roeg and Inspector Rank watched as the two escorts got hold of the living corpse and carried him away. They disappeared into the mouth of the tunnel.

Rank raised an eyebrow and smiled at Kidd's plight.

"Now the State is safer for the common good of all," he preached.

"If revolutionaries such as he would just learn to conform," Dr. Roeg reasoned.

Rank tied the belt of his trenchcoat and saluted the doctor. "You have done well and my superiors will be informed. Keep up the good work, Comrade." He walked stiffly out.

Roeg nodded in solitude and thought himself a genius.

The basic flaw to Roeg's machine, thought the barely-conscious Kidd, was that it did not kill the mind at the moment of impact.

It expanded it.

He feigned sleep as the transport hummed along the country roads. The two escorts were in the front, arguing about something.

Kidd retraced the journey in the Headbanger: he remembered the explosion and the blind, split-second sensa-

(continued)

tion of falling forward--then his head had impacted against the wall.

At that instant in his mind, a pinhole had been punctured. He had seen a small white dot of light, but the pinhole began to elongate. It became a thin tear in an endless black fabric.

The tear began to lengthen and soon shafts of blinding white light shot in from the rip, which in turn became a gash.

He had become unconscious from the trauma, but upon waking, he realized he still had his mind.

Not only that, but he couldn't believe how his mind was changing, growing. Ideas became full-blown facts, memories became crystal clear, and philosophies and disciplines became a true, plentiful substance.

The universe was creeping in through the gash.

And as the transport rattled on, and the escorts hissed at each other, Benjamin Kidd made a wondrous discovery.

He had friends.

They were talking to him from the Potato Farm, where they feigned their mindblank as they grew in number; they were waiting for a suitable leader with which to overthrow the State.

They had well-concealed, unimaginable powers.

We look forward to meeting you, Benjamin...

Kidd suddenly knew how to respond back to them, even though they were miles away.

And I you, he replied.

****

Judy Belfield

INNER EYE

Walk in drydust
long lane stretching out
to cobalt clear sky
lit translucent
by late afternoon
desert sun.
De Chirico columns
lined up in perspective
to a vanishing point
which infinitely disappears
and disappears
like a spiral straightened
the length of God's life.

Cards stand edge to edge
knave of hearts sneers
lip curled churlishly;
he knows the secret solutions
to puzzles plotted
when the War raged
and Daddy pretended to be a hero.
In teacups
the real surrealism evaporates
leaving a ring of illusion
no gypsy can interpret.
In ignorance, we ask a question
as shrill as wind
through a bell tower
in the distant cobalt sky
infinitely disappearing...

****

MaryAnn DesMarais

WHERE DOES IT END

Head aches -- so bad
radio plays -- so long
tears fall -- so sad
heart beats -- so strong

Confusion sets in
The house so quiet
yet I can't think thru the din
It's in my mind this riot

With every passing day
My soul starts to mend
I think to my self -n- say
No one hears or cares:
Fine! only where does it end?

****

V. G.

CONTRAST

SHE WAS
WHITE TO THE WORLD
WITHOUT A
SPOT; now
she cries
at her
uncleanness.

****

M. RamZ

IN DREAMS

In dreams, at least, my words are heard
By one to whom it matters most.
She also looks into my eyes,
As if this girl I'd never lost

In dreams, it's true, is she still mine
And all is as it was before.
The lake of summer nights is there--
Our hands connect; we walk the shore.

In dreams will she meet me again
By iron gate that keeps her yard.
Alas the rooster crows far off
And I must leave though it be hard.

In dreams was she all mine to hold,
But daylight brings me back to sense,
To cold, to pain, to toil, to life
Where she no longer cares two pence.

****

M. RamZ

WE ARE ALL PRISONERS

We are all prisoners of what we are,
led barefoot down cold corridors
deposited into cells that fit our worth.
And there sit most of us, happy for our
allowance of bread and measure of lettuce
rarely asking for more than the power to endure.
And when some fool attempts to break
the warden's best laid plans
either he is locked away a solitaire
or sentenced to death.
None of us is free, only numbers are we.

****

John Buell

FRAGILE

Like a plane of glass
Like a bird's tomb,
Like a child's mind,
Like a mother's womb.

****

Jacque Kuriger

EVENING THOUGHTS

Now the day
Burns away.
Dark is here
    Sleep, my dear.

And to sleep,
    lie calm and still.
Then if you please
Think of these:

Streams that flow
    silver slow
Murmuring ...murmuring
Sweet--clear--cool--
    floating pool.
Hushed so still
Around a hill.

Stars wink there
    sleepy fair.
Drenched with night
Pale moon light
And soft tunes
    Played so slow
    Kind and low
As you sink down
Into rest
Blankets quiet, upon your chest.

****

Lisa Strubin

BE CAREFUL, BE CAREFUL

Be careful, be careful!
That's all I ever hear
Anytime I try to go somewhere
Don't wreck the car
Stay away from drunks.
Go the speed limit.
Don't follow closely
Please be on time
And yes after all that,
Remember to have fun.

****

Elizabeth Russell

PREMONITION

The River Nile seeps
Eternal life to her kings.
Tutankhamen winks.

****

D.O.A.

NO MOON SHONE

No moon shone through the cloud-covered sky as a car with its two occupants pulled to the side of the deserted country road. Lightning streaked across the sky, revealing what appeared to be a dilapidated house sitting behind a group of eerie-looking trees a short distance from the road. As the rain began to fall, one person climbed out of the car and ran toward the house.

Jonathan hadn't remembered seeing a house here the other day when he was driving through the country. He wondered if anyone even lived in this rotting, old house. He opened the storm door and tapped lightly on the inner door. The wind started blowing the rain in blinding sheets. Jonathan leaned forward and fell as the door screamed open. The storm door slammed shut behind him.

Immediately he was back on his feet. He appeared to be in some anteroom. A flight of stairs led into darkness directly in front of him. Occasionally, lightning flickered in a large picture window at the top of the stairs imbedding on his retina a photograph of his surroundings. The upstairs was a sort of landing that surrounded the foyer. To the right of Jonathan in the foyer was a tall coat rack and beneath, an antique, brass umbrella stand with several umbrellas in it. To the immediate left of the door was a smallish table with an ancient telephone resting on it. Everything was coated in a fine, powdery dust that was easily disturbed as Jonathan examined the room. Also on the left was an archway leading into what appeared to be a sitting room. Opposite on the right-hand wall was a mystery. Clearly, there had once been a door, but now it was boarded up quite solidly.

Another glimmer of lightning frighteningly illuminated the upstairs. For an instant, he could have sworn he saw a deathly pale face filled with terror lurking in the uneven shadows. The thunder destroyed his illusion and brought him back to his senses.

Jonathan stepped cautiously into the uninviting living room. Various chairs and a large settee surrounded a thin, long coffee table in the center of the room. Colorless drapes hung like dead leaves on a tree. Lightning continued to flash like a strobe light in the heavens. He brushed off a spot on the couch sending up clouds of choking dust and sat down.

"What are you doing?" commanded a deep, menacing, distinctly British voice from the doorway. Jonathan sprang to his feet, letting a pent-up yell loose. The face he had seen upstairs peered around the archway, no longer fearful but glowing with ominous shadows.

"Afraid of the rain, are we?" the old man quizzed, stepping fully into the room. His face split in two as an evil smile spread his lips, revealing bone-white teeth. He was dressed in an immaculate black suit with a deep blue cravat.

"I was...uh...just...looking..."

"Looking? Looking?" the old man mocked, waving his arms about grandly. Jonathan's eyes stung as the dust raised and settled. "Looking for what? Something to pocket? Something to plunder? Something of mine, perhaps, that you could quickly nip away with?"

"N-N-No..."

The old man continued, "Well, you aren't going to get away with it this time. I'm going to ring the police." He moved like a shadow into the foyer. He returned a few moments later cursing to himself.

"Blast! The lines are down and they probably won't be up until morning." He stood in thought for a few moments, then turned and walked back out of the room. "Don't try to leave!" he called as he clambered up the steps.

Now was Jonathan's only chance of escape. He quietly crept into the foyer and peered into the gloom upstairs. Curiously, he picked up the phone receiver. A dial tone blared loudly from the tiny speaker. The old man had lied! He tried the door. Just as he

(continued)

thought, it was locked with a small but effective skeleton-key type lock. Frantically, Jonathan flung himself against the decrepit wooden door.

"I told you not to leave," yelled the old man from the top of the stairs, "didn't I? Didn't I? But you didn't listen to me! You're like all the rest! They didn't listen to me, either, so I had to take care of them. I...I..."

Jonathan shuddered as he thought what might lie behind the boarded-up door not three feet away from him. The man was obviously insane and Jonathan could think of nothing to get out of the house.

"Who's in the car?" the man asked suddenly.

"W-What?"

"I said, who's in the car?" He slowly rose from the stairs. Deep menace burnt in his eyes.

"M-My w-wife."

"Is she pretty?"

"Yes, I-I guess."

"Why didn't you bring her in with you? "

"She didn't want to come in."

"Why?"

"We had an argument."

"I see. She doesn't want to be near you, but maybe she'd like to be near me." He stepped down the stairs as if he were dancing with an invisible partner and smiled happily in reverie. At the bottom of the stairs he said, "Bring her to me."

Jonathan stared at him in horror.

"You know I just had the strange impression that you don't want me to see your wife. I wonder why?" The demonic grin reappeared on the old man's face. Suddenly, in a fluid motion, he unlocked the door and leaped outside, taking one last look at Jonathan before continuing into the storm.

Jonathan looked out the open door and was barely able to discern the old man opening the car door. He closed his eyes as he heard maniacal cackling above the thunder. He joined in the laughter as he realized he had two people to bury on this stormy night.

****

Jacque Kuriger

LITTLE GHOSTS OF SUNSHINE

The little ghosts of sunshine
come back to us at night
And flit around the garden
Where they played as light.

They take the shape of fireflies
the fairies know them well
But the fairies make a promise
that they will never tell.

And so these bits of sunlight
pretend in phantom play
To be the fairies' lanterns--
these little ghosts of day.

****

Duanne Walton

THE DUKE OF DOOM

He marched into the arcade with a determined look on his face and a mound of quarters in his pocket. He scanned the room in search of his arch-enemy, the Duke of Doom. He spotted him in his usual corner, spouting off his mouth as always.

"I am the Duke of Doom! Challenge me if you dare! Hahahahahaha!"

He strode up to the Duke, quarter in hand.

"All right, you laughing hyena," he said. "Let's tango!"

And with that, he dropped the quarter in the slot, pressed the 1-player button, and the battle began.

The Duke hurled his army of arcade warriors at his opponent. The young man fought back bravely. He had challenged the Duke on many occasions, so he was quite aware of how to fend off the Duke's sinister soldiers. He waded through the Duke's mob of Robot Zombies, flying fiends, firebreathing bimbos, Granite grapplers, and wicky-wackies. Finally, he got the chance of a lifetime! The confrontation he

(continued)

had always dreamed about! A chance to battle the Duke himself in the Room of Doom!

The Duke leaped out at him, hurling flame stars. The young man dodged them, then opened fire on the video villain. The Duke evaded the blasts from his youthful adversary's laser gun, and tossed a bolt of blue lightning at him. The battle raged on for almost 5 minutes, then the dastardly Duke got in a lucky shot with one of his sonic beam blasts. The young man was defeated.

"Try again, humanoid! Hahahahaha-haha!" the Duke laughed.

The young warrior did indeed try again. He kept trying until he lost all of his quarters fighting the Duke. When he had lost his last quarter, he turned and stamped out of the arcade. But he stood in the doorway, pointed his finger at the Duke and said, "Duke of Doom, I'll get you one day!"

The Duke's only response was, "Hahahahahaha!"

****

James Burkey

THE DUEL

"You think you're so damn tough, doncha, Harley?"

"Not me, Galan Demonbane."

"You know what I mean, he's your character."

"Yeah, well, Galan is pretty tough, I must confess. He could probably kill your wimpy third-level fighter's ass without even using Blood-drinker!"

"What kind of sword is Blood-drinker anyways?"

"Well, when I first got it, it was a +5 Holy Sword of Demon-slaying, but since then I had my friend, the mage Jeryandus, Mark Lafton's character, infuse it with an additional spell that makes it fight by itself so I can do other things too."

"Huh. That's pretty cool. But I ain't no third-level fighter. That's my brother Tom's guy. I've got a ninth-level Paladin, and I think he can kill you. In fact, I challenge you to a duel. Whaddya think of that, hey Harley?"

"Mike, you have got to be the stupidest guy I've ever let play 'Warriors, Wizards and Werewolves.' You do realize my character is fifteenth-level, don't you? Besides, we're both Paladins of the same order. We aren't supposed to fight."

"Oh yeah? Well, my character breaks into your character's house and pisses in your ale. Now what, Mr. Demonbane?"

"Fine, Mike. If that is really what you want, my guy will fight your guy. But I only fight to the death, y'dig?"

"Fine by me, wimp. Hey, Lou! Come here!"

Lou, a well-known gamemaster at the school, strode across the cafeteria, his game-books present as always. As he approached, walking like a king amidst the other kids that played, knowing that they were in awe of his famous skill of gaming, he hailed his two colleagues.

"Hey guys, whatcha need?"

"Mike here wants to duel. You wanna run the game?"

"Sure. Lemme see your player-character sheets."

Lou studied the well-preserved, neatly folded pieces of paper that the two boys handed him for a few minutes, and then, turning to Mike, asked, "Mike, where the hell did you get this 'Sword of Knight-Slaying?'"

"Uh...," Mike stalled, angry that Lou had warned Harley of his secret weapon. "I got it in a campaign that Joe ran last weekend at his house."

"Well, you can't have one!"

"Why the hell not? Dipshit here," Mike stammered, indicating Harley, "has a fuckin' Sword of Demon-Slaying +5 that fights all by itself!"

"Yeah, but Demons and Knights are natural enemies and opposite alignments. Your 'Knight-slayer' is an evil sword. Paladins can't carry evil swords or they lose their Paladinhood and get turned into first-level grunts!"

(continued)

The Duel, continued

"That ain't fair! Now his character has got too powerful a sword compared to my only other weapon."

"What is it?"

"A Battleaxe +3, dip! It says it right there on my character sheet."

"Oh yeah. Well, then why don't we give you a choice of weapons and Harley can choose locale."

"Okay. We'll choose battleaxes!"

"Fine, where do you want to fight, Harley?"

"It has to be an open-space, right? Not my castle or anything?"

"Right."

"I choose the elemental plane of Fire! See how you like that, Mike. I have magic armor that protects me from magic fire."

"You can't do that!" Mike bellowed, feeling bullied by the thin boy.

"I'm afraid he can, Mike. Okay, both you guys are on the Plane of Fire. Flames and smoke prevail everywhere, and you will both take damage if unprotected. The various fire-demons and Flame-monsters are being held at bay by a magic sphere created by your god so that you two can batte in peace, so to speak."

"Do you have any magic armor, Mikey?" taunted Harley, snidefully.

"Just a second, I'm looking!" Mike scanned his sheet, looking for any possible defense, but came up almost empty.

"Well, Mike?" asked Lou, peering over Mike's shoulder to take another look at Mike's character.

"All's I got is a wimpy ring of Fire-resistance."

"That's all you need!" Lou exclaimed. "Your character is safe from the flames."

"I thought that it only protected my finger...?"

"No! Rings are the most powerful items, and it will protect you from every kind of fire, including dragon-breath, which Harley only gets half-damage from."

Mike was suddenly glad he forgot to erase the ring from his sheet, thinking it was basically worthless.

"Okay," Lou began, "roll to see who gets the first attack."

The two boys rolled a pair of six dies, and to Mike's pleasure, he rolled a six to Harley's 4.

"I go first! I run up to attack him and swing at him with my battleaxe!"

"Just a second, Mike. I happen to be wearing a ring of invisibility. You don't know for sure where I am."

"Aw, come on! That ain't fair!"

"Harley, besides the fact that Paladins are supposed to be brave, and a ring of inviso is a coward's tool, all the smoke from the fire is rubbing against you, and it isn't invisible. So he can tell where you are."

"Ha!"

"...but he'll be at minus two to hit, because you are so misty and hard to define."

"Shit! Okay, I roll...(Tosses the dice to the table)...an 18!"

"Okay, a ninth-level Paladin needs a 19 to hit armor class -8, which is what Galan Demonbane has, plus the fact that you are at minus two, which means you needed to roll a twenty-one, minus the three for your battleaxe's magic, which brings it down to 18, plus Galan's dex bonus of two, which puts it at twenty-one again. Sorry, Mike, but you can't even hit him, since rolling a twenty-one is impossible on a twenty-sided dice!"

"Now that ain't fair! An 18 oughta hit anybody!"

"Sorry!"

"Geez, and I was gonna do extra damage too, cuz of my Ogre-strength belt."

"You have an Ogre-belt?" Lou gasped.

"Yeah, why?"

"Because it also gives you plus six to hit, so you only need to roll a 15! You nailed him."

"Awesome!" Mike cheered, watching as Lou rolled the dice for damage.

"Twelve points of damage, plus the six for his Ogre-belt, plus the three from his battleaxe. Twenty-one points of damage, Harley."

Harley had been watching the whole thing with a bitter smile on his face, angry because he didn't get to attack first, angry because his invisibility ploy had failed, due to his own stupidity, and angry because no ninth-level Paladin should be fighting a fifteenth-level one. It was suicide!"

Harley got to fight back, though, and managed to inflict twenty-five points on Mike's Knight in return.

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The next few rounds of combat were simple tradings of blows, both missing more frequently than hitting. Then, Harley got an idea. He used his priestly powers as all Paladins may, to create Holy water, and at the feet of Mike's stupid Knight.

"Lessee," muttered Lou, checking his reference books," a 15th-level Paladin can create 15 gallons of water. You manage to create enough steam from the magic fire of the Plane to blind Mike this turn."

"Whaaat!?! Blinded? But then I can't hardly defend myself! He could do a critical hit on me and cut my arm off or somethin!"

"Yep." Harley grinned as he rolled the twenty die to determine if he hit or not.

"You need a seven..." Lou said simultaneously.

"A four. I rolled a four," was all Harley could say as he stared at the dice, knowing that with the way his luck was going, he might actually lose, and to a stupid jock with hardly enough brains to read the 'f's on his report cards!

"Haw! Now I get to attack, right?"

"Yeah. You going to do the same to him?"

"Naw. I'm gonna try something different. I'm gonna switch my battleaxe to my left hand and throw my dagger +2 at his face, called shot."

"Called shots are a lot harder, Mike," Lou warned. "You'll be at minus four!"

"Yeah, but I have a special skill in Dagger-throwing that gives me a bonus of five! So I only need to roll an 11, right?"

"You got it."

"Mikey, don't fail me now..." Mike muttered, shaking the dice in his hands for luck. "A 13! I nailed him square in the face!"

"Well," Lou began, flipping through his books, "you didn't roll high enough to put it through his eye and into his brain, but you did manage to blind him in his left eye and give him...thirty-seven points of damage."

"Thirty-seven?!?" Harley gasped. His Galan was down to fifteen hit points. Another blow could easily kill him.

"Now who's so tough?"

"You wait. This round I am going to call on my god for strength."

"You are?" Lou sputtered, surprised.

"Sure. If it works, I get completely healed, AND I get to strike with triple damage."

"Okay...it says here that fifteenth-level Paladins have a base chance of twenty percent."

"True, but I happen to have a talisman, giving me a bonus of 45%, and I wield a Holy Sword, at my side, which gives me an additional 10%."

"So you hafta roll a 75 or less on a die hundred. Roll," Lou said watching with fascination.

"Ha! My luck changes! A 19! I could have made it without the extra help!"

"Wha...you mean he's now completely healed up, his eye and everything?" Mike stammered.

"Yeah, and if he hits you, he does triple damage," Lou offered.

"Aw shit...! My guy only has thirty hit points left! He'll kill me!"

"You have an attack first, Mike. He still has only fifteen hit points until the end of this round, <u>then</u> he gets his healing."

"What?!? But I thought this was instantaneous!"

"Sorry, Harley, but it says in the Guide that it takes a full battle round to call on your Deity for favors."

"Shit! He could wipe me off the map by that time!"

"Yeah, and then we'll see what happens to your Holy sword! I might like one of those!"

"No way. I'll have Mark's magic user teleport my body back and Steve's Priest can raise me from the dead!"

"How are you going to contact them from the Plane of Fire before I kill you, smart guy?"

"I don't have to. They always know where I am, and so when they realize I've been killed, because when I get killed a special lamp lights up at our castle, they'll knew, and then they can..."

"...Guys! Shut up! We can argue that out after we know who dies!

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Roll the dice, Mike!"

Mike rolled the dice smugly, his confident smile turning to dismay when he discovered the very disappointing 7 he rolled.

"You missed, and now that I am powered with the strength of the gods, I roll a... 19! Plenty to hit you with! In fact, not only do I get to do my triple damage, I also get to roll a light critical, which means..." Harley paused, looking at Lou for the answer to his sentence.

"Mike, your guy gets his right hand cut off, plus he takes...forty-seven points of damage. You lost, Mike. Rip up your character sheet and let your next of kin know of this sad day."

"Shut up, Lou!"

"Hey, don't act so surprised! You were taking on a Paladin 6 levels higher than you, and one of the most powerful characters in the school! What did you expect?" asked Harley, smirking proudly.

Mike stamped off, angry at the loss of his favorite character, but with plans for revenge all laid out in his mind. No longer was he going to get pushed around by high level knights. No more bullying from every kid who had a wizard over the 12th level. No more games!

Harley came to school the next day with a black eye and swollen nose. No one questioned him about it, for fear of their character's life, but all knew that Mike was now a maverick, a renegade, a kid outside of the laws of their game system. Once again, it was the nerds who had to fear the jocks, and not the other way around. Once again, a reality set in over the school, as kids remembered the days before the game, when it wasn't so easy to be king.

****

Pamela Sieverin

SPY DAYS

While I was in the Armed Forces, I did some undercover work for their Secret Service. Let me tell you, it really was "under the covers' work." I have changed some things, but on the whole, the story is true. I won't tell you what was changed, I'll leave that to your imagination!

I was dating a cop and one night he had a meeting with a Secret Service officer. It seemed that the base cops were the main drug suppliers for the base and thus far they had been unable to furnish the guilty cops with handcuffs or demotions. The S.S. had set various traps, as they are prone to do, but the dealers had just slipped through their fingers.

They needed an inside plant and my boyfriend, the coward that he was, wouldn't play ball with them because it was too dangerous.

At the word dangerous, my ears perked up. As in spy novel type dangerous? James Bond type stuff? I asked. Yes, I was told to both of these ridiculous questions.

I quickly began putting my imagination to work. Gee, I could do things like that. I'd seen movies, and read books. I'd even slept with a few guys, so that wouldn't bother me. Besides, this was for my country!

My boyfriend never even batted an eye as I opened my mouth and volunteered to become one of the worst things one can become in the drug world...a snitch.

The next day I went to the S.S. office and received my briefing. It was quick and to the point.

"Find out where Mike is getting his drugs," my contact, Carl, said.

That was all. No secret code words, no "Get Smart" shoe phone, no briefcase with a secret compartment...just "find out where Mike gets his drugs." I left the office feeling a little let down, but very excited and scared. Now how was I going to do this? I had opened my mouth last night and said that men will tell women things they wouldn't tell men, and now I had to find out how that was accomplished.

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As I dressed for my date with Mike, I wondered if what I'd read in books was right. Could drug dealers really smell a snitch a mile away? If so, I wouldn't have a date that night and my career in the Secret Service would be over.

Mike arrived promptly at 6:30 p.m. and we headed downtown.

Now, downtown in the Phillippines is not the same as downtown Chicago. Bagio is a small dirty town. Picture any town with dirt streets, wooden sidewalks, about 20,000 people living in 5,000 houses, and you have Bagio. Oh yeah, they also do not have indoor plumbing. The city itself isn't that great, but they do have fantastic bars. And if you like to watch hairless women strip, the Phillippines is the place to go.

We settled ourselves at a table and after a beer Mike excused himself. I watched him go toward the men's room, then quickly turn and go out the front door. The next round of beers arrived, and I paid.

Fifteen minutes later I went to the ladies' room. When I came out I could see that Mike hadn't returned yet, so I glanced out front. He wasn't in sight, so I sighed and went back to the table. I figured he's caught my scent and left. Oh well, I had a couple of beers to drink, then I would leave too.

The floor show started and suddenly Mike sat down.

"Hi ya, miss me?" he asked

"I figured I'd been stood up," I replied.

"Not by this guy," he said as he kissed me deeply.

I shuddered all the way to my feet. My God, what a kiss, I thought as I almost melted and wet my pants. It was going to be hard to remember I was out to bust this guy.

Presently, Mike rested his hand in my lap and as his fingers started to rub my left thigh I reached for his hand.

I smiled up at him and whispered, "Please, don't start anything you don't intend to finish."

He stopped and put his arm around me, drawing me closer to him than I ever thought two people could get.

"What gave you the idea I wouldn't finish?"

As I looked into his dark brown eyes, my soul seemed to quiver. He lightly ran his fingers across my shoulder and collar bone towards my throat. I shivered. His other hand came into my lap.

"Here," he said. "I have something for you."

"What is it?"

"Just take it. Pop it into your mouth, and swallow it with a sip of beer," he instructed.

He handed me a black capsule. I'd never had more than a toke or two of pot before, and had no idea what he had given me. I trusted him with my body, but not when it came to drugs, but I quickly popped it into my mouth, depositing it between my back teeth and cheek, then downed some beer. A few minutes later, I excused myself and went to the ladies' room. There, I stuck the capsule in a tube of lipstick.

Back at the table I snuggled up close.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"Oh yes," I breathily smiled up at him.

After a few real slow dances, we left and headed to his place. He was one of the few individuals I ever knew of who lived off-base in the PI, it just wasn't safe for Americans, especially women.

Mike was renting a huge house, almost the size of an estate really. He unlocked an eight foot high gate and we walked into a beautiful courtyard. Another gate needed unlocking, then the house door. I was ushered into a beautiful living room. Wall to wall, thick white ankle deep carpeting covered the floor. A black conversation pit sofa took up one corner of the room and a complicated stereo and TV set occupied the opposite wall. Several floor lamps stood around and track lighting had been installed above the sofa. I dropped my purse on the sofa and asked for the restroom.

When I returned, Mike had fixed us drinks and the stereo was sending

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forth slow relaxing music. I took a drink from him and asked for a tour.

There was no way he could afford all this on his pay, I thought. Granted, he had one stripe more than me, but I knew the pay scale and that only meant $100 more a month. He had to be selling an awful lot of drugs.

We were in his bedroom, which was just as lavish as the living room, when he took my drink from me and gently pulled me into his arms. Sinking onto the bed with him, he started kissing my neck and ears. One hand unbuttoned my blouse while his other hand tickled the back of my thighs.

I gently pushed myself away and murmured that I needed a shower. I also needed some time out. My pulse was racing and my head was spinning. It wasn't just from all the booze! I desperately needed to remind myself I was dealing with a drug dealer here. Not just a very handsome, virile, sexy, erotic, sensuous man. While I was at that moment very much aroused, I tried very hard to remember I was working for my country, and I wasn't here just to quell my passions. The shower did help a bit, but I was still anxious to appease my desires. Besides, I figured, if it took a little fun to close a case, why not!

When I stepped from the shower, Mike was no longer in bed. I went into the living room and found him on the sofa going through my purse.

"What are you doing?" I asked. Although it was obvious, I felt I needed to say something.

"I had to make sure you took it."

"Took what?"

"The pill I gave you. You aren't reacting like anyone else I've ever seen, and I just had to be sure you weren't going to pass it on."

He started to put things back into my purse, gave up, and walked over to me.

"You are beautiful..." he said as he picked me up and carried me to bed.

Our lovemaking was fast and furious. Over almost before it began. Another drink, and we started over again. This time, very slow and fulfilling.

The next day, after I finally came back down to earth, I turned my pill over to Carl.

"This is speed," he said. "Where'd he get it?"

"Downtown, I suppose. We were at the Ragtime Bar when he disappeared. He returned and game me this."

"How long was he gone?"

"About a half an hour."

"A half an hour?" Carl shouted, slamming his hands down on his desk as he stood up. "He could have gone anywhere in that amount of time. Didn't you follow him?"

"Of course not! He said he was going to the bathroom. He'd just ordered a round of drinks, how was I to know he'd sneak out?"

"All right. What did you learn about a pot shipment?"

"What pot?"

"We heard from a very good source, there is a big shipment of pot on its way to Bagio. We need to know when and where delivery will be."

"Mike doesn't deal in pot. You told me yourself that he's just a pill head."

"Right. But he has connections. We need that information." Carl reseated himself and I knew my interview was over.

"I'll see what I can do for you," I said as I left.

I was working a double back that day, which meant that although I had just gotten off work at 4:00 p.m., I had to be back at work at midnight, meaning I wasn't seeing Mike that night.

It was almost a week later when I finally had a chance to talk to Mike about drugs again.

We were seated at the Ragtime and I brought up the subject of buying some pot. He said he didn't deal in pot. I said yes, I know that, but didn't he know of someone I could contact for some?"

Mike responded by telling me to shut up and I said he didn't have to get so huffy over just a question. I should known better than to pursue the issue. He'd caught my scent. The snitch had been snitched on, and I was in deep trouble. I didn't know it then, but a contract had been put out on my head, and at that moment I was worth a lot more dead than alive.

But I did pursue the issue and when he called me an S.S. whore, I knew the game was up. Again I should have shut up and left, but at that time my temper ruled and I slapped him; feeling myself impervious to retaliation. He responded

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with a back hand and I responded in kind. In a matter of minutes, we had just about totally destroyed the bar. The last thing I remember was being on the floor, with Mike sitting on my chest, his hands encircling my throat.

When I came to, I was in a Jeep, almost at my door-step.

The next day, with a black eye and swollen jaw, and cracked rib, I informed Carl that my Secret Service days were over. He said he understood.

I have decided, since then, that if James Bond ever needs any help, I do have experience; however there is a catch: I get to ride off into the sunset with the hero!

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Judy Belfield

MASQUERADE

Tomfoolery, dressed up as genius,
dances in a three-ring fishbowl
with a genuine smile
pasted on its Einstein face,
splashes antics
as carelessly as moonlight,
is seen by an audience
with creme-de -la-creme taste
who judges the proceedings
astutely
and pronounces inanity superb:
real ignorance
burrows further from light
cannot emerge on another side
its eyes narrow
its ivory body
as slick as a maggot
just as ready to feast

****

M. RamZ

BIRTHDAY DINNER

The small checkered tablecloth put miles
between us
As we quietly wrestled with hides of steak
And ourselves.
The old man across the distance looked
familiar,
But we acted more like midnight shift
steel workers
Eating somberly in some gritty, god-
forsaken hole.
My mind juggled memories gamely,
But there was no flavor in them.
And when words came, they were
As late as the check;
Something about "...happy birthday, son."

****

d f aiello

JOSIE'S BIRTHDAY

The little round rooster-shaped clock hung above the doorway, ticking its minutes by tail and beak.

Josie sat, knees sprawled, lungs huffing from the bed she had just made and swallowed her cup of tea as she watched the beak of the rooster slowly move toward the big 12 at the top of the cocky bird's head.

Josie was eighty today. She had saved two dollars from her social security checks, one dollar last month and one this month, and sixty-four cents from linty coat pockets and crumb-filled sofa cushions. It had taken her two weeks to find the nickels, dimes, and pennies, huffing and wheezing her way through boxes and furniture packed away and left to rot since Harry had died--ten years ago today--her birthday.

Josie went to see Harry every year. The bus ride across town was one dollar and twenty-five cents, with her senior citizen discount, and one dollar for her ice-cream cone, double-scoop, while she sat on the bench and talked to Harry's stone.

It had been a lousy thing to do,

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dying like that on her birthday. Josie had found Harry in the middle of the kitchen floor in his paisley print pajamas, arms sprawled out at his sides, like Christ on the cross, lying there stone-cold while the steam rose from the old grey kettle and floated up, disappearing for a moment until yellow streaks could be seen running down the dirty walls leaving yellow globs deposited at the bottom of the streaks as they slowed in the cooler air.

Josie had told the ambulance drivers what a lousy thing it was for Harry to do on her birthday, and the policeman who came later and the delivery boy who comes once a week from the grocery. She tells him once a year.

But Josie doesn't see the streaks decorating the once-white walls. Or the string of webs collecting in corners of the cark front room. Or the delivery boy who takes an extra fifty cents from her laid-open extended palm, feeling justified for having to talk to the blind old lady once a week and smell the damp, sick-to-death-smell that came creeping out the door as she slowly backed it open until it was there, filling his nostrils as he grabbed his own-given tip and ran back to the grocery.

Josie saw the dark beak stand straight while the shorter tail pointed toward the very small refrigerator sitting by the back door, rattling as it worked to keep her buttermilk cool. She walked to the front hall closet and took out the Sunday coat. The big grey tweed sat crooked on her stooped shoulders. She could still smell Harry's after-shave clinging to the dirty wool.

The nine-fifteen crosstown bus screeched as it stopped and opened the doors. Josie rode quietly, trying to see what rolled past the window view.

A young, blond, bouncing teenager boarded the crosstown and took the empty seat next to Josie. The music overflowed from her skinny ear covers, reminding Josie of the hot water she frequently pours too much of in her small porcelain cup, spilling out where she didn't want it to go.

The music was getting louder and the fluffy-haired teenager was bouncing faster and harder trying to keep up with the sound echoing out of her ear piece and filling the air Josie felt was hers.

It never occurred to Josie to move. After all, she felt she had been there first. She was the one riding to the end of town and it was her birthday. Harry always told her she could have whatever she wanted on her birthday.

Even though Harry had been dead a long time, Josie remembered everything he told her. She did have trouble remembering his face sometimes, but she always remembered the bald spot on the back of his head and his grey suit he saved for weddings and funerals. That's where she saw him most times, lying in his coffin, arms no longer spread out like a bird's wings, but folded nice, fingers touching as they lay neatly on his chest with his grey suit looking starched and creased.

Josie felt pain as the teenager hit Josie's shoulder with her radio in her waving arms.

Josie smiled as she rubbed the sore spot. She smiled as the familiar rumblings and gurgles started turning over in her intestines, as they always did after her morning pot of tea.

The bouncing teenager didn't hear the warning which Josie felt was only right. Suddenly the bouncing stopped, then Josie felt the teenager and heard her leave for the front of the bus. Josie rode, smiling the way across town. She could hear Harry telling her about getting old.

"People expect you to be silly when you get old, so why not use it when you need to?"

Josie remembered everything Harry every said to her. When she got off the bus at Oak Hill Cemetery, Josie went across the street to the ice-cream shop first.

She sat on the cold stone bench, eating her double-scoop chocolate cone, talking and laughing with Harry's stone while people stared and shook their heads as they walked down the sidewalk.

"That's all right," she told Harry's stone. "It's my birthday."

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Ruth B. Gray

CHRISTMAS RECOLLECTIONS - 1987

Yesterday my sister, Alice, told me she and her family were going to spend Christmas in Missouri. A few minutes later Peg, my oldest sister, phoned informing me that she and her husband were going to Florida for the holidays. I felt disappointed and perhaps a little hurt. I usually celebrate Christmas with my sisters since I am alone.

There is a part of me that still wants the same kind of Christmas that we had when we were children. The entire family together. My more logical part tells me that it is impossible. Both Mom and Dad are gone; as well as Grampa, Aunt Mae and Uncle Muck; Uncle Jim and Aunt Hazel; Uncle Bill and Aunt Alice, all gone, but certainly not forgotten. The big old house we lived in behind Dad's gas station is gone, too.

Most importantly, what is not gone is the love and care we all shared. From the very first Christmas I am able to remember that love was evident. In 1936 I was 4 and my sister Alice was 7, my folks' business didn't do well at all. But, at Christmas the whole family was there, and I recall our gifts as if it were this Christmas. That Christmas morning of 1936 we were greeted by Mickey Mouse dolls. We had overheard the folks talking about things being so bad that we were convinced that we would not have a Christmas that year.

Christmas customs in my parents' home followed the old Scot's ways. The Gray clan would gather with their closest friends and the bagpipes would start. The best memory was the singing--that is where I learned many of the folk tunes from my grandfather's birthplace. My uncles all had fine voices and they would lead the singing of the carols and the songs of the highlands. On holidays, my uncles resplendant in their kilts, with midnight blue velvet jackets, over frothy white lace-edged shirts, would perform all the Highland dances and then later lead everyone in the wild reels that originated in the Lowlands. As long as Grandpa Gray was alive, these customs were kept. But, surely as the Scot's burry speech pattern faded from our family, so did these wonderful customs.

My three sisters have their own homes, and have established their individual holiday customs. As for me, I've been by myself and have no children since 1970. Prior to this second attempt at the state of singlehood, I tried to establish holiday customs in my household. The very fact that my spouse did not consider them important was one of the mitigators in the demise of my marriage. It is no fun to do those things alone.

One gets greater joy and satisfaction out of life in doing for others. Personal pain and anguish really does diminish every time you do or say something that makes a difference in the life of a fellow sufferer.

Isn't it strange how one's serious thinking leads the thinker down so many paths, particularly during the Yuletide season? The past seems to be coming in loud and clear in the most wonderful warm ways. As I go on doing my volunteer work, I keep recalling my Mom's favorite admonishment to me when I would let myself roll in self-pity. Mom would say, "You know if you would just get busy and start doing things for others, your problems will soon disappear." One of the secrets of a good life is reaching out to others and it is inconsequential whether someone reaches back because you have put your burden aside to help another. And, when you pick your burden up again, it is not nearly as heavy as before. At the age of fifty-five, I have made the most wonderful discovery. I had the smartest mother in the world!

There have been fifty-five Christmas days in my life. The first 21 were spent with my family doing all the things I've been writing about. Those days were filled with helping Mom in the kitchen, making candy, peeling apples for homemade apple pie, mashing pumpkin for the same purpose and most of all, watching in utter fascination while Mom made Scot scones and luscious golden tan shortbread. My 22nd Christmas was spend in Navy Boot Camp at U.S. Naval Training Center, Bainbridge, Maryland.

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From then on, there were few holidays with my family.

The remainder of my Christmas holidays read like a road map. That itinerary included San Diego, San Francisco, Fort Devon, MA, Camp Lejune, NC, Nicosia, Cypress, Washington DC, Brussels, Belgium, Geneva, Switzerland, Saigon, Vietman, Hong Kong, New York City, and now back home. Each one of the places was special, each in its own way. One of the most memorable was in Vietnam where I was privileged to get to see Bob Hope's last Vietnam show.

Even though these were special days, not one was as special as being at home. My eyes sting and a king-size lump forms in my throat every time I recall Christmas with my sisters and my parents. Another year when business was not too good, Alice and I were again aware that there would be no new dolls, roller skates, or other toys. For weeks before Christmas after Alice and I would be sent upstairs to bed, we would hear the tapping of a hammer, and Mom's treadle sewing machine whirring and thump-thumping away into the night. On Christmas morning, we really didn't know what to expect when we went downstairs. The sight that greeted us was beautiful upholstered chests. Upon opening them, we found them packed full of clothing for our Shirley Temple dolls we had received on last Christmas.

Although the age of the chest is close to forty, I still have mine. The upholstery is quite tattered and is rotting off the wooden crate Dad put together, it is still a symbol of what my parents did to make the bad times good for us. Every time I look up on that shelf where it sits I still get the same feeling I had that morning I first saw it.

The year after my father died I was in Switzerland and wouldn't be able to get back to Illinois until January. Regardless, I went shopping for a gift for Mom. As everyone knows, Mom is hard to buy a gift for. I went from one Swiss shop to another looking at lace, handmade leather goods, clocks and watches. Nothing seemed to be the "right" gift. As I trudged down one of Geneva's narrow side streets, I came upon a small shop that specialized in music boxes. I browsed around for awhile, and was on my way out the door when to my right in a small display case something caught my eye and said, "Buy me." It was a beautiful pendant watch on a long gold chain. The case was cloisonne (Chinese metal work with etchings and enamel layered). The enamel was a brilliant Chinese red with gold etching in the shape of delicate flowers. When the watch case was opened, a tiny music box played Debussy's "Clair de Lune," which was one of Mom's favorite pieces of music. After purchasing the watch, I felt as though I had gotten a shiny star and wrapped it up to give Mom. When I arrived home, I could hardly wait to give Mom her gift. When she opened its velvet case, I knew that I had picked the "right" gift. For the first time in my life, I felt as though I had really made my Mom happy. After that, every time Mom had an occasion to wear her pendant, you could hear her announce, "This is what my Ruth picked out and brought home from Switzerland for me." That look on her face still gives me the warm fuzzies. No Christmas present ever brought me so much joy as the one I gave to Mom!

All these recollections I have been relating are the things that make me happy even though I may be spending this Christmas alone. Because, in reality, I will be physically alone, but spiritually I will have so much company, my tiny house won't hold all my friends.

My spiritual guests will include the kind soul who came to my rescue out in Barstow, California when my husband deserted me; the friends in New York City who knew me slightly but still tended to me and cared for me when I was so ill in New York Infirmary; the dear friend who came to my aid when I was beaten and raped; my deceased friend, "Woody," who shared the same birthday with me who never forgot to drop a line no matter where on earth he was; my friends who huddled and prayed with me when the bombs were raining down in Cypress; my friend whom I met in Vietnam and have shared love and companionship over the past 18 years; the life-long girlhood friends who are a long distance away but have kept in touch through thick and thin; and all the others who have played very important parts in my life.

It is not important to receive gifts nor is it necessary to give material

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things. That is not what Christmas is about. It is the time of a new beginning, a time of renewal. It is a time to step back and decide that it is better to give of oneself than to sit back and wallow in self-pity. True freedom and self-worth to me go hand in hand when I do something for someone else.

One wonders why, particularly during the Christmas season, we are given to flights of nostalgia. A few years ago, I found myself really beeling blue and perhaps shedding a few tears when recalling Christmas of the Past. But, after analyzing my feelings, I found that the tears did not fill that empty feeling I had. When I dried the tears and admitted that those days are gone, hope seemed to fill the void. The hope I'm speaking of is the kind that pushes you on simply because the future "special days" will provide for more memories and more friends.

This Christmas will be a very quiet holiday for me. Part of the day I will be doing volunteer work with Crisis Line. Maybe the sound of my voice over the phone will make a difference to someone who is really in pain.

******** Jacque Kuriger

READ ME!

A girl I met upon the street
was a happy, impish sprite.
She of song and smiles and curls
she doesn't read the things I write.

A man bedecked with labor's dust
comes home so late at night.
He's proud to earn a long day's wage
but, he doesn't read the things I write.

A man of wealth who whirls past
with a foreign auto, clean and light
Who buys books by the tens anc scores
HE doesn't read the things I write.

Who is it then, that reads my lines?
My prose and verse so bright?
The hard worked teacher, with pen in hand
Alone he reads the words I write!

****

Daniel E. Howard

WHAT REMBRANDT DID BEST

He's a dog of a breed of a new kind of seed.
He watches intently, records what he sees.
He catches chased bumpers. He bites the wrong tails.
Other dogs wonder, but Rembrandt prevails.
No bones about him, and proud of the sticks
that chased him as a puppy while he ran for bricks.
His mansion's a doghouse. In swamp he has hooks,
and he merges with greatness when no one else looks.

****

MaryAnn DesMarais

A KALEIDOSCOPE

whirling twirling
twisting turning
patterns unfurling
images burning

mirrors reflect
successively symmetric
shapes deflect
brilliantly electric

colors changing
helplessly drawn
constantly rearranging
unrelenting pawn

What a fun game
in a little tube of glass
it's never the same
Isn't that how life seems to pass?

whirling twirling
twisting turning...

****

John Buell

COME TO ME

Come to me,
into my cocoon,
and peer out from me.
What do you see?

****

MaryAnn DesMarais

ALWAYS WANTED TO

There's been so many
quiet walks I've longed to take
in order to turn the key
on words I've wanted to say
to you..I always wanted to.
There's been so many
beautiful dreams that seemed to wake
after you made me see
that they were mine to make
Thanks..I always wanted to
There's been so many
things I've wanted to do...
Memories -- we all keep
the moments too few
Before I lay once more to sleep
I must say: Dad, I Love You!

****

James Burkey

MY LOVE FOR YOU

My love for you is as deep as the sea.
My love for you is busy as a bee.
My love for you is as lovely as a flower.
My love for you is like a great tower.
My love for you is as sweet as a peach.
My love for you is like waves at the beach.
My love for you grows with each day.
But, let's face reality--my love is a cliché.

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